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## **Socialism, National Utopia, and Rock Music: Inside the Albanian Rock Scene of Yugoslavia, 1970–1989**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the nascent Albanian rock scene in Kosovo in the 1970s and 1980s. It argues that the rock scene represented both a subcultural movement as it “deviated” from the prevailing Albanian culture in Yugoslavia (and Albania, as well), introducing new forms of expression, as well as a countercultural movement within the larger Yugoslav space for it conveyed political messages which challenged the predominant political order in Yugoslavia. As a cultural phenomenon embedded in a specific socioeconomic and geopolitical context, the Albanian rock scene in Kosovo, although relatively short-lived, initiated important changes in the cultural and social life of Kosovo.

### **Keywords**

Albanian rock, Kosovo, Yugoslavia, Albania, subculture, counterculture

### **Introduction**

With an increase in the scale of political autonomy of Kosovo in the late 1960s and early 1970s, an overall economic and social development followed in the country, in particular its capital Prishtina. As a consequence, the city moved from what Nemanjić (Gordy 1999: 106) would define as a “peripheral provincial town” to a modern city and cultural center of all Albanians in Yugoslavia.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, there emerged a kind of subculture promoted by “young people who emphasize specific forms of artistic creativity (music, dance, etc.) and cultural innovation in general (lifestyle, image, slang) in contrast to the prevalent ones” (Tomc 1994: 113). This subculture emerged mostly in the form of new poets, musicians, and bands that started playing rock music, as

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<sup>1</sup> The term “Yugoslavia” in this study refers to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY).

well as new wave styles of music, that characterized the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Thus, a new phase of the mushrooming of music bands began in Kosovo.

The key to this development most probably rests on the rapid, and primarily quantitative, development of the school system between 1966 and 1981. If in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War illiteracy was rampant in Kosovo (at 90 percent), in 1980 elementary school attendance rate was 93.1 percent, with around 37,000 students enrolled at the University of Prishtina (Rusinow 2008: 254). Combined with a bottom-heavy demographic profile (Kosovo had the highest birth rate in Europe), this rapid development of schooling led to a situation where one third of the country's population was enrolled in a school or university (Rusinow 2008: 255). This led to the creation of a new stratum of young people fully conscious of their national rights, which could be radicalized much easier than the old communist cadres that led Kosovo since WWII. It was this new student population that sparked massive protest in Kosovo in 1968 and 1981 with demands ranging from the improvement of socioeconomic conditions in Kosovo and the elevation of Kosovo's status to a fully-fledged republic, to unification with the state of Albania.

The emergence of the rock scene in Kosovo was immensely affected both by the development of the Western and Yugoslav rock music scenes in the 1960s, Yugoslavia's opening towards the West after 1948 being a major factor (Ramet 2002: 129). Developments in Kosovo with regard to rock music were directly impacted by developments in the West, which reached people in Yugoslavia mainly through radio and television broadcasting—and above all, Yugoslavia's main cultural centers, Belgrade, Zagreb, Sarajevo, and Ljubljana. Predominant elements of the rock scene in the West and those of Yugoslavia were combined and supplemented with local motifs from Kosovo to create a relatively authentic breed of Albanian rock. Thus, despite the direct foreign influence, certain particularities can be noticed in the rock scene in Kosovo, which above all are connected to the cultural and linguistic differences of the Kosovar Albanians from the rest of the Yugoslav peoples. This emerging rock scene drew inspiration from Albanian folk and popular music (Estrada) in Kosovo that was consolidated in the late 1960s, and partially from folk music in Albania, which became more present among Albanians in Yugoslavia during the period of lively cultural exchange between Kosovo and Albania (1971–1981).

This study will examine the emergence of the Albanian<sup>2</sup> rock scene in Yugoslavia, particularly Kosovo in the late 1970s and 1980s, with a focus on

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<sup>2)</sup> Unless stated otherwise, in this study the term “Albanian” refers to Albanian culture, language, and ethnic belonging within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) and not to

the differences in style and content of the various groups. I will argue that the Albanian rock scene in Yugoslavia was both a subcultural movement for it “deviated” from the prevailing Albanian culture, introducing new forms of expression, as well as a countercultural movement within the larger Yugoslav space, conveying political messages which challenged the predominant political order in Yugoslavia. The Kosovo rock scene, however, almost withered away even before it even had the chance to be consolidated due to the political developments of the late 1980s and early 1990s, especially the break up of Yugoslavia, and in spite of the innovations it brought into Albanian culture.

The first part of this article focuses on the similarities, differences, and interrelations between the rock scenes in Kosovo and the other regions of Yugoslavia. The second part looks in more detail at the main Kosovar Albanian rock groups of that time such as MAK, Lindja (Dawn), Gjurmët (The Traces), Ilirët (Illyrians), TNT, TRIX, Minatori (The Miner), and 403, etc. The remainder of the study analyzes both the subcultural and countercultural characteristics of the rock scene in Kosovo.

### **Albanian Culture in Yugoslavia**

In the first years following the Second World War, Albanians in Yugoslavia were mostly unnoticed in the broader cultural sphere of the Yugoslav state, something that was conditioned directly by the prevailing political circumstances and the overall marginalization of the Albanian population. From 1945 until 1963, Albanians, who lived in pretty much compact territories divided between three Yugoslav republics, Serbia (with Kosovo as an autonomous region where the majority of Albanians lived), Macedonia, and Montenegro, had the status of a national minority and with the exception of the use of language in elementary schools did not enjoy many other political and cultural rights. However, major changes occurred in late 1960s and early 1970s with the increase in the political rights of Albanians which culminated with the autonomy of Kosovo in Yugoslavia in 1974. Meanwhile, in 1963 Yugoslav authorities dropped the term “national minority” and replaced it

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Albanians in the state of Albania. In fact, the Albanian rock scene in Yugoslavia was the only Albanian rock scene since the orthodox communist regime in Albania fanatically stood against any liberalizing or ‘westernizing’ initiative. Hence, there was no rock scene in Albania until after the fall of communism.

with the more politically correct term “*narodnost*,” which in English can be translated as “nationality.” This change was part of a broader process of decentralization of power in Yugoslavia. By that time a university (University of Prishtina, UP) was established in Kosovo, along with a television station (RTP), Academy of Sciences, Albanological Institute, and National Theatre, etc., there emerged a new generation of young people who became visible not only in the cultural sphere in Kosovo, but also in the whole of Yugoslavia. Painters such as Muslim Mulliqi, Gjelosh Gjokaj, Rexhep Ferri, actors Enver Petrovci and Bekim Fehmiu, and poets such as Mirko Gashi, to name but a few, were among the first Albanians to become famous throughout Yugoslavia, thus representing the cultural success stories of the time.

The establishment of the University of Prishtina (on 15 February 1970), which was the first and only Albanian-language university in Yugoslavia, marked the beginning of a new era of opportunities for the cultural development of Albanians in Yugoslavia. With 7,712 students from all over Yugoslavia (KOHAnet 2010) enrolled in the first year of its functioning alone, the University of Prishtina was soon to become the cultural, social, and scientific center of Albanians living in Yugoslavia. UP was established two years after massive popular and youth protests in Kosovo which demanded the cultural and political autonomy of Albanians and equality with other nations in Yugoslavia. Thus, its foundation marked a turning point in the political and cultural empowerment and development of Albanians in Yugoslavia. The status of the Albanian language changed as well. As expressed in the words of a communist official of Kosovo at that time, “the Albanian language [is] not only a language of sawyers, street cleaners, loaders, and farmers” (KOHAnet 2010), but a language of science and culture as well. The establishment of the University of Prishtina, combined with the enormous expansion of newspapers, journals, and magazines published in the Albanian language, created conditions for the rapid political and national emancipation of Albanians in Kosovo. According to Magaš (1993: 36), this created a “whole new strata of state and party officials, industrial managers and university lecturers, teachers and policemen, radio and television personalities.” Indeed, most of the pioneers of rock music in Kosovo were studying in Prishtina at the time that they formed their first bands.

In general, there was a strong tendency among this generation of young people from Kosovo to prove that, despite many stereotypes about Albanian “backwardness,” they were not different at all. In the words of a rock singer from Kosovo, “the abnormal position of Albanians in a country called ‘The [Socialist] Federal Republic of Yugoslavia’ had given rise to a very strong inner

need to prove one's self as 'normal,' as 'modern,' like everyone else in this world" (Kelmendi 2001: 20). This need to show that Albanians were equally worthy in any possible respect was one of the driving forces of the emerging new Albanian elite's determination to break through provincial cultural borders. However, when it comes to rock music and participation of Albanians in the Yugoslav rock scene, one should not underestimate personal and professional motives, as well as willingness to be part of a shared transnational culture. For instance, when rock was dominating the music scene in Yugoslavia in the 1970s and 1980s some Albanians were part of the most famous Yugoslav rock bands. To name but the few, Nexhat Macula played in YU Grupa (which together with Bijelo Dugme (White Button) were among the most popular rock bands in Yugoslavia), Shefqet Hoxha played in Vatrene poljubac (Fiery Kiss), Seat Jakupi was the singer of the Konkord (Concorde) band from Skopje, and Menan Kiseri, a famous guitarist from Prizren, was part of various Bosnian bands.

Their personal success and affirmation came at a time of overall national and cultural revival of Albanians in Yugoslavia. However, by being integrated into the (sub)cultural scene of Yugoslavia, this generation of artists from Kosovo reaffirmed both their Yugoslavness and Albanianess, as Yugoslavism in Tito's Yugoslavia meant above all Yugoslav citizenship, something which was not in contradiction with the particular ethnonational identities (Marmullaku 2003: 309).

Apart from these examples, other Albanian rockers were mainly concentrated in Kosovo and performed in Albanian. Especially in the 1980s, folk elements and ethnic motifs became more prevalent in music, not only in Kosovo, but also in the whole of Yugoslavia. Moreover, as argued by Sabrina Ramet (2002: 127) Yugoslav rock music was deeply colored by political messages and political allusions. This politicization when combined with the linguistic differences at the inter- and intra-republican level caused a fragmentation of the Yugoslav rock scene into local scenes and networks. As Tomc (2009) stated, there was not a single and unified Yugoslav rock scene, but rather different scenes. Therefore, seen in this context, though not at the same level with the republican scenes, Kosovo's rock scene could be considered a separate one.

### **Separated Worlds: Serb and Albanian Rock Scenes in Kosovo**

Politically, culturally, and socioeconomically, Yugoslavia represented a rather diverse space. Composite nationality groups of Yugoslavia had diverse cultures

and psychological frameworks, which for rock music meant different independent rock networks (Ramet 2002: 128). Although the rock scene in Kosovo was largely influenced by developments in other parts of Yugoslavia—namely the emergence of rock bands like Bijelo Dugme (White Button), Azra, Indexi, Riblja Čorba (Fish Soup), and Leb i Sol (Bread and Salt)—due to the differences in language, ethnic elements, and folk motifs utilized by Kosovar rock groups, it constituted a distinct scene.

Inside Kosovo, however, two “separate worlds” (Maliqi 1998) of culture coexisted, the Serb and the Albanian. The Serb–Albanian antagonisms were expressed in music as well, mainly because of the “ethnic impulse” which was present in the text and music. Many groups while being “willing to innovate and to look to autochthonous sources of musical inspiration ... turned to the folk heritage of Yugoslavia” (Ramet 2002: 128). In this way, as argued by the Croat journalist Darko Hudelist (1989: 116), relations between the two main national groups in Kosovo were presented in a unique and even tragicomic way: “The paradox is that rock music as a phenomenon is international, not national at the core.” The result, as Ramet (1994: 106) writes, was that the ethnic separation of Serbs and Albanians was reflected in two parallel rock scenes that were divided by language, ethnicity, and politics, where Serbian groups in Kosovo sang in Serbo-Croatian for local Serbs, and Albanian groups sang in Albanian for local Albanians. Nonetheless, in the traditional annual Kosovo rock festivals, Albanian, Serb, and Turkish rock groups once sang in front of mixed audiences. The most popular Serb rock group from Kosovo was Led (Ice). It used to organize concerts also in predominantly Albanian-populated cities (Hudelist 1989: 113–115).

Although language was what divided most of the Albanian bands and singers from their Slavic counterparts, examples of ethnically mixed bands and artistic cooperation between groups in Kosovo and Yugoslavia are not entirely absent. Many groups in Kosovo had Serbian, Bosnian Muslim, or Turkish instrumentalists and many Albanians were cooperating with other bands in Yugoslavia. So, these two “worlds” of music did not run completely independent of each other. The fact that rock groups from different national groups in Kosovo played together regularly, as well as that there were ethnically mixed groups throughout Yugoslavia, reflect tendencies inherent in the rock music to transcend national and cultural barriers.

There were also Albanian artists in Kosovo who chose to perform only in Serbo-Croatian. Such is the case with pop artist Zana Nimani, who was the first lead singer of the prominent Yugoslav band Zana from 1980 to 1985 as well as a successful solo artist. In 1986, she released her solo album *Noćas*

*pevam samo tebi* (Tonight I Sing for You Only) for the major Yugoslav label Jugoton. Another serious endeavor to bridge the linguistic gap with Albanians came from the famous Bijelo Dugme band, which in 1983 released a song in Albanian called “Kosovska” (The Kosovar Song). This song was part of their *Uspavanka za Radmilu M* (A Lullaby for Radmila M) album recorded in 1983. The text of the song, which drew on a famous Albanian folk song, was coauthored by Zija Berisha, Agron Berisha, Shpend Ahmeti, and Goran Bregović. The song became very famous throughout the country and was widely perceived as a gesture of sympathy for and solidarity with Albanians at a time when the latter were seen with suspicion following the 1981 protests and riots in Kosovo, where students and people chanted anti-state slogans (some groups were even propagating Enver Hoxha’s hardline communism and unification of Kosovo with Albania) and asked for political and national equality in Yugoslavia. The official video clip for the song also bore a political message with young men portrayed standing behind iron fences, referring to the isolation of Albanian youth from the wider Yugoslav cultural scene.

### Roots of Rock in Kosovo and the Emergence of the First Albanian Rock Groups

Both the political and socioeconomic changes that occurred in Yugoslavia and Kosovo in the late 1960s brought about the emergence of the rock scene in Kosovo. At the socioeconomic level growing investment and industrialization in Kosovo increased the number of city dwellers from 15 percent in 1953 to around 35 percent in 1980 (Rusinow 2008: 259). Prishtina’s population increased from around 40,000 in 1945 to roughly 200,000 in 1980, plus some 37,000 students that gave fresh life to this fast urbanizing environment. Contributing to the creation of conditions for the flourishing of rock music were the establishment of Prishtina Radio Television (RTP)<sup>3</sup> and the Boro and Ramizi Hall<sup>4</sup> in Prishtina, the largest hall in town (with a capacity of 10,000) where the main concerts were held. In 1980, Prishtina was a vibrant city with its characteristic *korso* (traditional evening promenade) full of young

<sup>3</sup>) As Ramet (2002: 144) writes: “The media are also a crucial part of the system. The ‘super’ channel on television carries a lot of rock videos, from both Yugoslavia and abroad, and this is an important medium for promotion.”

<sup>4</sup>) Boro Vukmirovic and Ramiz Sadiku were partisan soldiers from Kosovo who died in a battle in WWII, thus becoming the symbol of the ‘Brotherhood and Unity’ doctrine in Kosovo.



people walking up and down, modern auditoriums used for plays, ballet, and music, an active youth center with all sorts of indoor sports, dancing, and art courses, as well as plenty of coffee houses and cinemas (Rusinow 2008: 284). At the political level, Yugoslav post-1949 liberalism and especially in the 1970s was such that “everything [had] begun to be allowed in music” (Kelmendi 2001: 35).

It was 1964, the year when many famous world rock bands launched their singles—The Searchers with “Needles and Pins,” The Supremes with “Baby Love,” Roy Orbison with “Oh Pretty Women,” and The Kinks with “You Really Got Me”—when the first Albanian rock band in Kosovo and Yugoslavia was formed, named the Blue Stars (Shala 2010). The first members of this group were Agim Berisha, drummer, Afrim Luboteni, guitarist, Veton Berisha, guitarist as well, and Luan Berisha, Agim’s brother, who played the bass guitar. The band, which in 1966 changed its name to Modestët (The Modest), initially performed famous pieces by The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Moody Blues, and later on Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin, and Status Quo, which they first heard on the waves of Radio Luxemburg. Despite the fact that the technical and material conditions for young musicians were generally poor, there was a lot of enthusiasm among both the artists and the audience, especially students. As Agim Berisha recounts: “It was an idyllic era. I remember in an event where we performed, we had problems with our sound system, and the people waited patiently for three hours until we were able to continue performing. The young people would never stop dancing at those events” (Shala 2010). The band ceased to exist in 1981, a time when tens of other Albanian rock bands were already active in Kosovo. Though “Modestët” did not have an original repertoire, performing songs by Western bands or acting as a session band, it basically introduced rock culture to a growing number of Albanian students and young people in Yugoslavia and paved the way for other bands that were to come later.

In the late 1960s another group called FAN was formed. This group originated from the northern town of Mitrovica. The guitarist and the most famous member of the band was Nexhat Macula, who would later be part of another group from Mitrovica, TNT. In many aspects, this was the first proper rock band in Kosovo and the one that introduced rock music to the Kosovar youth and helped make it popular all over the country. Later in 1970 another group called Marimanga (The Spider) appeared on the scene lead by the guitarist Njazi Bytyqi. That same year the band recorded a song in the studios of TVP “Vogelushja Ketë” (Petite Ketë), which became very popular at the time.

In 1973, the same year when Bijelo Dugme (probably the most famous Yugoslav band ever) was established, another rock group called MAK was created in Mitrovica. This group, which became very popular in Kosovo, had six members: Haki Misini,<sup>5</sup> Mehmet Tupella, Rexhep Ismajli-Bulli, Halil Bajraktari, Sedat Isufi, and Xhevdet Gashi. Though most of the songs were about love, usually there was an underpinning political or cultural message reflecting the major sociopolitical changes of the 1970s. The song “Moj e mira te pojata” (The Nice Girl at the Door) was their greatest hit. The group ceased to exist in 1978. In the spring of 1974, Veli Sahiti, Muhamet Bislimi, and Nuredin Azemi established another band called TRIX. Some of their famous songs from 1970s include “Për ty” (For You) and “Dashuria në qershor” (Love in June), which were also performed at local music festivals. Its first album “Krushqit e pajtimit” (The Suitors of Reconciliation) was released in 1989.

While Modestët marked the breakthrough of rock culture in Kosovo, it was in the following decade when rock music really bloomed. The introduction of a yearly music festival called Rinia këndon (The Youth Sings) in 1974 offered a good opportunity for the promotion of many new bands and single artists. The organization of such music festivals, which were widespread all around Yugoslavia, was in line with the broader Yugoslav cultural management logic of domestication of pop culture. The years 1980–1989, however, saw the formation of many new bands which drew on the experience of the preexisting ones and brought new elements into their artistic creations, such as, Ilirët, Gjurmët, 403, Telex, Seleksioni 039, Minatori, Menkis, TNT, Fisnikët, and so forth. September 1982 saw the organization of the first rock festival in Kosovo, called Boom, where most of these new bands were promoted.

A very popular rock group, maybe the best and the most famous one in pre-1989 Kosovo, was Gjurmët (The Traces). It had five members and Migjen Kelmendi was the vocalist (a lawyer by profession, and son of one of the most famous writers in Kosovo). In the period between 1980 and 1986, the band recorded some 30 songs. According to Kelmendi (2001: 35–36), the group used music to say something meaningful and articulate political stands, its activity represented an “aesthetic refusal through lyrics, which did not have poetic ambitions in terms of style, but had something of poetry’s density of meaning.” As a musical style, Gjurmët adopted elements of the new wave (Kelmendi 2009). The band recorded all its songs at Prishtina Radio Television

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<sup>5</sup> Haki Misini, the vocalist of the group, was later a member of some other bands in Kosovo. He was killed by Serb forces during the war in Kosovo in 1999. The other member of the group, Mehmet Tupella, went missing during the 1999 war as well.

(RTP) and released their first and only cassette in 1985. Gjurmët's most famous songs are "Hero i qytetit pa lum" (Hero of the Riverless City), "Të gjitha rrugët të çojnë në Prishtinë" (All Roads Lead to Prishtina), "Në tren për Perzeren" (On the Train to Prizren), and "Të shtrirë mbi kanape" (Laying Down on a Loveseat).

In 1983, another group Lindja (Dawn) was formed by Luan R. Osmani, Fatos Berisha, Afrim Maloku, and Bujar Hundozi, who joined the band later. While Gjurmët experimented with folk and was influenced by funk and new wave music, Lindja was influenced more by post-new-wave bands and music. Moreover, Lindja was the only Albanian rock band that avoided entirely love themes and clichés (Shala 2004). Some of their best songs include "Kënga ime" (My Song), "Automeni" (Auto-men), "Nata" (Night), "Kur ne të vdesim" (When We Will Die), and "Zvarraniku" (Reptilian). Lindja is one of the few Albanian bands that continued to play even in the 1990s, when it became especially famous to parody two very old and popular Albanian songs: "Qengji i vogël" (Little Lamb) and "O moj ti me sytë e zi" (Oh You With Black Eyes).

Later rock groups include Minatori (The Miner) and 403. The former group, which played hard rock, survived till today and still is one of the most famous Albanian rock bands, its most famous songs are "A thua vetëm ëndërr je ti" (Are You Only a Dream), "America," and "Mihane." The latter group (formed by students who were residing in room 403 of a student dormitory at Prishtina University) stopped playing music in the late 1980s and it shortly reunited in 2007. 403 was established in 1981, the year of massive student protests in Prishtina, by Mentor Gjurgjiali (bassist), Fatmir Zajmi, Naim Osmani, and Hektor Gjurgjiali (vocals and guitar). Arben Godanca and Veton Orana joined the band later. Over a short period the band recorded the songs "Boemi" (The Boem), "Kujtimi" (Memory), "Indeksi" (School Record Book), "Shoku profesor" (Comrade Professor), and "Paraja" (Money), which occupied TV and radio top-hit lists for many sequential weeks. The band ceased its activity in 1986, partly due to the conflict its members had entered into with the directors of RTP, who would not allow them to record their cassette. 403 finally recorded its first album in 2002, with eleven old and four newly recorded songs.

In what follows, I will look into the political and national motifs found in the songs of many groups, something that renders Kosovar rock a kind of subculture in relation to overall Albanian culture (including Albania) and counterculture in relation to Yugoslavia. As already mentioned, the overall political developments in Kosovo and Yugoslavia were very influential in the cultural life and emerging music scene. The same cannot be said about Albania, however. Due to the extreme isolation under Enver Hoxha's regime,

Albania and its culture were more a utopia than a real world for Albanians in Yugoslavia.

### **Kosovo's Rock Scene as Counterculture**

The emerging rock scene in Kosovo in the 1970s and 1980s undoubtedly contained some oppositionist elements. With songs that conveyed political and nationalist messages, rock bands in Kosovo were in opposition to the central political system and the state itself. Indeed, many of the rock bands in Yugoslavia became somehow involved in the ongoing political debates, especially in the 1980s. Thus, they were not only against the communist system, but in a wider context, many bands that inserted national motifs into their songs positioned themselves against another nation or nations. Migjen Kelmendi (2001: 85), one of the pioneers of rock music in Kosovo, and a publicist in today's Prishtina, argues that:

all the rockers of Yugoslavia together opposed the socialist iconography and the communist establishment ... But almost all of us who were unified against the Communist and Socialist Idol—from Ljubljana, Zagreb, Sarajevo, Belgrade, Prishtina and Skopje—kneeled and humbled ourselves before the new idol on the horizon—the National Idol.

Kelmendi's rock group Gjurmët likewise, by using elements of Albanian folk and national motifs in their lyrics and music, "kneeled down" before the Albanian national idol. Kelmendi himself acknowledges that the aim of Gjurmët was to show their Albanian ethnic identity, and that its entire cassette (from 1985) was a reaction to what was happening elsewhere in Yugoslavia—"a barricade against the nationalism of the others" (2001: 87–92). The group expressed its criticism toward the system, especially against surveillance and the ideological control of Albanians after the 1981 protests in one of its first songs from 1983, "Microphone":

A microphone, standing free  
A microphone, yes, now I have it in my hand  
I have something to say  
I have something to say  
I have something to say  
I know that you have endured much  
That this does not please you at all  
But it still isn't too late—break up once and for all.

Gjurmët incorporated Albanian national motifs in three other songs. In the song "The Man and the Castle," they use the motif of Castle (*Kulla* in

Albanian), which in Albanian tradition is both a house and a fortress, thus alluding to the Albanian's long battle for freedom. In the second song, "Laying Down on a Loveseat," Gjurmët combines motifs from the Albanians' endeavor for independence and the hope that the difficult times of the 1980s will come to an end. In "My Unsung Song," Gjurmët emphasizes the motif of the century-long repression of Albanians.<sup>6</sup> This was a reaction to the political events in the early 1980s in Kosovo rather than an expression of sympathy for Albania's national-communism. However, as Branka Magaš states, "It is notoriously difficult to draw the line between national affirmation and nationalism, and for a country like Yugoslavia, it [was] extremely dangerous to confuse the two" (1993: 12). In fact, state authorities in Kosovo seemed to believe that the latter was the case. Thus, after the 1981 student protests in Kosovo, with the directive of the members of the Socialist League of the Working People of Kosovo, all of Gjurmët's songs were removed from radio programs and the video clip of the song "All Roads Lead to Prishtina" was censored.<sup>7</sup> The production of Gjurmët's cassette by RTP likewise was delayed for some time because a controversy over the cover page.

A more mild case, such as the group Fisnikët (The Noblemen), which was known for its rock ballads, occasionally incorporated political motifs in its songs. In this context, the song "Ujku plak" (Old Wolf) is an expression of the ultimate need of a young person to seek solitude amidst all the political and personal problems that most people faced in Kosovo in 1980s:

I am tired, I am sad  
I am fed up with deception  
I am full of politics  
I decided to leave you  
Leave me alone so that I can feel better<sup>8</sup>

Likewise, in the case of the group Minatori, the band touched upon "social issues inside national ones" (Hudelist 1989: 125). The aim of the group was to

<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the Albanian traditional and national motifs, see Darko Hudelist (1989: 123–124) and Migjen Kelmendi (2001: 119–120).

<sup>7</sup> In Yugoslavia there was no separate Office of Censorship or any government office entrusted with the task of listening to rock demos and determining what may and may not be published. However, secretaries of culture or radio and TV editors could decide on the quality and appropriateness of texts. In the case of Kosovo, RTP engaged writers to 'correct' the texts of 'uneducated' rockers from grammatical errors (Ramet 2002: 139; Hudelist 1989: 129).

<sup>8</sup> Author's translation of the song lyrics, as well as the following one.

reproduce popular feelings of the time. The vocalist of the group, Naser Gjinoçvi, considers Minatori to be transmitter of the time and space that people live in. According to Gjinoçvi, their songs “always contain love, social and urban themes, as well as themes on political protests” (2003). Motifs of Albanian nostalgia are also present in the song “Në kyrbet” (In Diaspora) by the group Ilirët (Illyrians). On the other hand, most of 403’s songs contain social themes. For instance, songs like “Boemi” (The Boem), “Indeksi” (School Record Book), and “Paraja” (Money) all focus on the hardship and difficulties of student life and the central place that money takes in everyone’s life. The following refrain from the song “Paraja” is very illustrative in this context:

The world does not move around spontaneously  
 Money moves the world  
 Money moves the world  
 And only money

In general, most of the songs of the Albanian rock bands from Kosovo contained what Ramet (2002: 134) calls “the ethnic impulse.” Especially after the student protests of 1981 and the deterioration of the situation in Kosovo, ethnic motifs and impulses became more prevalent in rock music in Kosovo. This was true of local Serb bands in Kosovo as well, who were influenced by the predominant nationalist discourse in Kosovo and Serbia, and the increase of mistrust between the two main communities living in Kosovo. Indeed, especially in the 1980s, ethnic motifs and elements of national folklore became more prevalent in other parts of Yugoslavia as well. Bijelo Dugme was the first Yugoslav band to draw upon folk idioms for inspiration, and other groups, such as YU-Grupa and Idoli also drew upon folk motifs. Certainly, this should not be exaggerated since the majority of the bands in Yugoslavia were protesting strongly the nationalist euphoria. The Belgrade band Idoli was a specific case, forming a concept that was based on the spirit of the Serbian national renaissance and its album of 1982, “Odbrana i Poslednji Dani” (Defence and the Last Days), was inspired by the Byzantine and Orthodox heritage and independence war of the Serbian people (Kelmendi 2001: 86).

However, when the political situation deteriorated in Yugoslavia after the death of Tito in 1980, the oppositionist character of the rock music was directed not so much against the communist system per se, but against others’ nationalisms. In Kosovo, as almost everywhere in Yugoslavia, rock music was more than a unique and powerful means of self-expression, in many aspects it became an expression of national aspirations. In the case of Kosovo, many rock groups expressed the national aspirations of Albanians. Thus, the concept

of nationhood was produced and reproduced through music and culture. In this respect, these rock songs were, using Hebdige's (1979: 80) terminology, symbolic forms of resistance and spectacular symptoms of a wider and more generally submerged dissent, thus rendering it to the level of a countercultural movement within Yugoslavia.

Nonetheless, Kosovo's rock scene of the 1970s and the 1980s also contained elements of a subculture, especially if we look at it in relation to the broader Albanian culture (including here the state of Albania), an issue discussed in the following section.

### **Subcultural Elements**

The initial tendency of Albanian intellectuals in Yugoslavia was to view Tirana (Albania's capital city) as the center of culture and thus "borrow" everything from there. Kosovo's acquisition of political autonomy in 1974 "coincided with extensive cultural and educational cooperation between Albanians in Kosovo and Albanians in Albania" (Kostovicova 2005: 45). This was an opportunity for Albanians in Yugoslavia to reestablish connections with their co-ethnics in Albania, and, according to Ibrahim Rugova, a literary critic in the 1970s and 1980s and then political leader of Kosovar Albanians, "the beginning of the 1970s was a time when Albanians in Yugoslavia were rediscovering themselves" (Clark 2000: 40). In the words of Anton Logareci, having been denied for many generations anything that nourished national consciousness, Albanians in Yugoslavia by the 1960s were like "a very parched sponge, immensely avid to absorb anything that helped to illuminate their past history and made some sense of their current situation" (Judah 2000: 38). As a result of the agreements signed between Kosovo and Albania in the field of television and radio broadcasting, publishing, applied arts, film, theater, music, and sports, there was a "single Albanian cultural space built on cross-border cultural cooperation, [where] Albania emerged as a cultural donor and Kosovo as a recipient" (Kostovicova 2005: 47).

On the other hand, there was also a very conscious attempt of Albania's communist leadership to gain adherents in Kosovo. So, "though welcoming visitors from Kosovo, the Albanian government never allowed their nationals to travel unofficially to Yugoslavia, nor did they permit non-Albanian Yugoslavs to travel to Albania" (Magaš 1993: 10). In addition, Albania used its national radio and television (which due to its extra strong transmitters could cover almost half of the territory of Kosovo) to propagate its anti-revisionist ideology

in Yugoslavia. Although the real extent of Tirana's propaganda resonance in Kosovo is unknown, in 1981 the Yugoslav authorities blamed the "illegal Marxist-Leninist groups" inspired and supported by Tirana for the organization of violent protests.

Notwithstanding, a new Albanian subculture was about to emerge in Kosovo in the field of music. Yugoslav liberalizing policies in the field of culture and music offered better opportunities for the development of the rock scene in Kosovo as compared to Albania where Enver Hoxha's orthodox communist regime crushed any liberal voices in politics, culture, and music. Thus, in the 1970s, Prishtina in many aspects became the center of an independent organism functioning outside the larger Albanian and Yugoslav cultures. However, its influence among Albanians in Albania was minimal or even nonexistent. While interested in increasing influence among Albanians in Yugoslavia, Hoxha's regime was vehemently opposed to any cultural influence coming from Yugoslavia. Surveillance was so widespread that it made any clandestine activity (such listening to the foreign radio stations) almost impossible. As Tomc argues, "members of the rock subculture are above all cultural nonconformists, putting their emphases on alternative cultural practices such as creativity, life style, image, and slang" (1994: 132). Many rock groups in Kosovo brought about innovations and creativity in style and slang. This led to the creation of a new "urban minority" and at least in Prishtina and other major cities in Kosovo, musical taste became, adopting Eric Gordy's expression, "an important signifier" of the disinclination between urban and peasant culture (1999: 105). Rock culture thus was a signifier of a new generation of Albanians who started to create their own cultural identity independent of cultural influences from Albania.

In addition, the Albanian traditional (conservative) way of life and the difficulty many settlers faced in accommodating themselves to city life were often satirized in the songs. As a consequence, bands like Gjurmët or Lindja became icons of Prishtina and heroes of the narrow but fanatic mob of urban people. According to Migjen Kelmendi, Gjurmët's song "All Roads Lead to Prishtina" was largely seen as "a social critique of the movement from the villages to the city and of the primitivism of those who came" (Kelmendi 2001: 71). This tendency to satirize cultural and political backwardness, which is known as "new primitivism," was present in Sarajevo as well (Ramet 2002: 134).

Cultural innovations (lifestyle, image, slang, etc.) introduced by the rock bands in Kosovo did not go unnoticed. On the contrary, attacks came from many sides. Starting from December 1985, a polemic appeared in the main daily Albanian newspaper in Prishtina *Rilindja* (Renaissance) and continued



for four months.<sup>9</sup> The whole debate was incited by a young poet and journalist for the student journal *Bota e Re* (New World) who attacked rock music, saying that it was unacceptable to the ideological aesthetic surroundings and called the followers of this music “the deserters of today.” He made a further comparison between folk and rock, such that the former is inherent to the *Oda* (a large room in traditional Albanian houses where men gather) and the latter is inherent to disco clubs and cafeterias where young people use drugs and alcohol. Most of the people who commented on the article criticized rock for being a “product of capitalism,” a “corrupt ideology,” and for causing degeneration among the youth. Rock was thus criticized for being both anti-national and anti-communist. Few people who defended rock, among them Veton Surroi (today a publicist and a famous politician in Kosovo), emphasized the fact that the return to the *Oda* was a return to a “feudal and clan relationship,” and that, unlike in an *Oda*, it is in disco bars and cafeterias that Albanian women are equal to men.

Another type of criticism directed towards rock music came from broadcasting, newspaper, and journal editors who opposed the slang used by many bands. As discussed in a previous section, there were cases when songs which were broadcasted on radio or television were considered inappropriate because of the slang or political connotations. Rock music’s political and cultural non-conformism became a target of both the party apparatchiks in Yugoslavia and national(ist) circles within the republics. Rock bands were usually attacked for being decadent, degenerate, and immoral, especially by the national romanticists of all sides, who “fought” hard to preserve the cultural purity and superiority of their respective national groups.

## Conclusion

In general, rock music is about self-expression and individual freedom and autonomy. Moreover, there is something intrinsically “oppositionist” about rock music that is completely obvious to everyone (Ramet 2002: 136). As seen throughout this study in the case of the rock scene in Kosovo, there was something inherently “oppositionist” as well. Rock groups such as MAK, Gjurmët, Minatori, Lindja, and 403 through their music opposed both the Yugoslav

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<sup>9</sup> For a detailed description of the debate, see: Darko Hudelist (1989: 117–118) and Migjen Kelmendi (2001: 107–112).

political system and the predominant Albanian culture. In this context, Kosovo's rock scene in the 1970s and 1980s was both a subculture and a counterculture that emerged and grew up in a very particular socioeconomic, cultural, and geopolitical context.

The emergence of the first rock groups in Kosovo brought about both cultural innovation and contestation, as they caused much debate. According to Hudelist (1989: 110–111), the debates caused by rock music were developed in three levels all together: musical, sociological, and political. At the first level, rock music is set against traditional music. At the second, there is a contradistinction between urban and rural and cafeteria and *Oda*. At the third level, the antinational is against the national (Non-Albanian vs. Albanian). All these debates were very vivid, difficult, and extremely contradictory, not only in the case of Kosovo, but in the whole of Yugoslavia. In late the 1980s, however, the third debate became predominant. In particular the rock scene in Kosovo was focused on political issues and political considerations were often central in lyrics and songs.

Certainly, developments in and around the rock scene and music scene in Kosovo affected to some degree the process of the redefinition of the national, cultural, and political identity among Albanians in Yugoslavia. The young generation of the 1960s and 1970s was living at a very specific moment when Albanians in Yugoslavia (re)discovered and (re)defined their national identity (including the reinforcement of the sense of fraternity with their kin in Albania), and achieved the highest level of integration in the political and sociocultural system of Yugoslavia. These two processes were not always complementary because, as Denisa Kostovicova put it, “along with a right to open schools in the Albanian language in Communist Yugoslavia, Kosovo Albanians were also given [by the state] a clearly mapped-out symbolic field within which the markers of their national sense of identity were to be fitted” (2005: 50). This implied loyalty to the state of Yugoslavia, as well as symbolic severance from any sense of membership in the wider Albanian nation in the Balkans. Within this delicate political and cultural constellation, the pioneers of Albanian rock in Yugoslavia chose to appropriate and utilize various aspects of both the wider Albanian cultural community (ethnic and linguistic) and the Yugoslav political community (liberal values) and create something new. In other words, this nascent rock scene in Kosovo lived in a very peculiar cultural and political context where there were two neighboring and competing Albanian polities, “one of them autonomous within nonaligned ‘Titoist’ Yugoslavia and the other a sovereign and ‘Stalinist’ Albania whose xenophobic rulers in Tirana claime[d] that theirs is the motherland of all Albanians ... and

the world's first totally atheistic and only truly Marxist-Leninist state" (Rusinow 2008: 251). Yet, they opposed various aspects of both the preexisting cultural and political maps and pushed the borders of cultural change considerably, as well as introduced important changes in youth culture.

Because of this two-fold opposition, which I have depicted and analyzed in this study, the Kosovar rock scene of 1970s and 1980s was a cultural novelty whose social power became relatively strong. But the preexisting socio-economic and cultural reality in Kosovo combined with the political situation in the late 1980s prevented the full integration of rock scene into the official culture, something that happened elsewhere in socialist Yugoslavia. Migjen Kelmendi put it this way: "The fact that Kosova had never before seen long hair, rock and roll, nor sexual revolution in its Utopian Albania, made Kosova abort us along with our songs, our look, and our guitars" (2001: 142). After the abolition of the autonomy of Kosovo in 1989 and the beginning of the Yugoslav wars, the rock scene in Kosovo almost disappeared, thus reversing a cultural trend that even had some characteristics of a cultural revolution.

Following the abolition of Kosovo's autonomy in 1989, and then the eruption of the armed conflict in Yugoslavia, the rock scene in Kosovo was waning. In the following period of the high political and national mobilization of Kosovo in the 1990s, rock was sidelined and replaced by a folk and popular music scene (Estrada) that draw mostly on nationalist motifs. This was so until the end of the Kosovo war in 1999. The post-1999 ('newborn') Kosovo rock scene has become lively anew. Together with the new bands and songs, rock songs from the 1980s have grown in popularity, not only among older generations that recall those days with nostalgia, but also among the younger generations. Hence there is a prominent place in the Albanian cultural canon for the rather short-lived but remarkable rock scene of the 1970s and 1980s.

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